



CHINTU LING'OMBA

HEAD: CLIENT COVERAGE AFRICA REGIONS, CORPORATE AND INVESTMENT BANKING

Why is 'Why she leads' important and where does it fit in SA's current context?

As a woman leader in the corporate environment, for me, representation matters. This campaign showcases women in leadership in Standard Bank – understanding the role Standard Bank plays in African countries where we're present actually sends the message to many women that it's possible to be a corporate leader on the continent.

What do you think helped you the most to make a career as a woman?

It's one thing to have the skills and capability which is non-negotiable, but I also don't underestimate the power of people guiding and helping me chart a path that's authentic to me. People who also speak up for me around tables I have no access to and where, let's be honest, they may not be naturally biased towards me, as a woman, an African, and in the SA context, a foreigner.

The importance of my own leadership journey's 'Holy Trinity': mentorship, coaching and sponsorship, has been a game changer for me. Leadership has a deep element of wisdom associated with it, that comes with one's own experience or one's ability to lean on others' experience to accelerate your own learning. So for me mentorship is a necessary aspect of learning from others. As I mature in my own career and leadership practice, knowing when to be one of these things for others means I myself get better at how I ask for the support I need.

How can male corporate leaders become allies that grow women leaders?

We underplay the absence of allies for women in leadership and decision-making roles in the corporate environment.

I've had more male than female sponsors in my own career. Partly because there are more men in leadership positions. Just that act of sponsorship

– done deliberately and voluntarily – can shift the dynamic, because this is where male corporate leaders actually have a level of control.

I emphasise voluntary – when the act of supporting women is voluntary, the allyship goes deeper across levels and actually helps to nurture and develop a sustainable leadership pipeline. It also becomes 'how we do things here', which becomes a self-fulfilling act of leadership development.

Why would companies benefit from having more women at the top?

Companies that have gender-diverse decision-makers make better long-term decisions and are sustainably better performers. It's necessarily about seeing the world through more than one lens when leading a company into the future.

How should women support one another in their organisations?

If you have the opportunity to mentor, coach or sponsor, seek out other women in your organisation.

"When you're in a decision-making position, don't be afraid to actively prioritise other women in your mentoring, coaching and sponsoring activities."

How do you deal with being underestimated or undervalued?

Being underestimated is relatively easy for me. If a decision is mine to make, I make it without apology. I no longer feel the need to prove myself. Undervaluing is a difficult one. I haven't been undervalued for growth opportunities, but I've certainly been undervalued as far as pay. So, once I have the data and the language, I'll raise this.

How do you continue to learn and expand your knowledge?

Traditional learning methods and information exchange with experts/people who know more still – work for me – reverse mentoring from younger people has been an incredibly powerful learning tool for me.



DEBORA BEKKER

EXECUTIVE: EQUITY RISK SOUTH AFRICA, CORPORATE AND INVESTMENT BANKING

Why is "Why she leads" important?

Standard Bank boasts excellent talent, and it behoves us to showcase it. Women have stories of inspiration or are simply superlative in their roles, but their contributions may go unnoticed in a male-dominated field. "Why she leads" is an opportunity to elevate and celebrate our women leaders.

What are the biggest contributors to your success?

Excellent training and wholesome, empowering relationships with mentors, role models and confidants. Without these, my journey would have been significantly less fulfilling. More importantly, my partner has consistently provided incredible support, whether with difficult career-related matters, celebrating successes or family logistics.

What challenges do women leaders face, especially in financial services?

Not having an enabling domestic environment – the so-called triple burden of womanhood – means that the majority of women have more to juggle than their male counterparts. We need to enable and encourage men to take up non-career-related responsibilities with paternity leave and flexible working hours.

What is the value of mentorship in the workplace?

Good mentorship nurtures leaders and can unlock a young person's perspective on work, planning, career building, networking, conflict resolution and work-life balance.

"Leadership is taught, not just innate. Incrementally increasing exposure to appropriate levels of responsibility is the key to nurturing talent."

What role can male corporate leaders play in fostering and growing women leaders?

True equal treatment transcends formal rules and gestures and is

achieved when women are de facto equals. A true ally for gender equality is not just someone who is 'on your side', but somebody who seeks to see your perspective, however jarring it might be to their own.

How do you handle criticism?

I take professional criticism in the best spirit possible, and where I've succeeded in making the necessary changes, it has made a vastly positive difference. I'm also lucky that I'm amnesic to non-professional criticism.

What's your approach to taking care of yourself and your mental health?

I'd love to have enough time to exercise, take time off, practice gratitude, pamper myself and connect with loved ones. Realistically, self-care is more prosaic – protecting my mental bandwidth, celebrating small victories, and not despairing when I can't achieve everything.

How should women support each other in organisations?

Go out of your way to make other women feel seen and encouraged. Show compassion in times of conflict, disappointment and/or grief.

Which women would you invite to dinner and why?

Jacinda Ardern – she's a strong yet compassionate leader who understands the compromises that need to be made. Winnie Byanyima, for her eloquence and actions towards social justice and gender equality in Africa.

What is your advice for the next generation of female leaders?

You can achieve almost anything, but you're unlikely to achieve everything. Be explicit about your goals and plan accordingly.

There is something to be said for limiting your targets, being easy on yourself for your imperfections and leaning hard into your strengths and passions.

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